

This photo is identified as "operators at the switchboard in the operating room, Atlantic Coast Telephone Company", from The Suffolk Herald 1907. These operators connected all calls and started every communication with the request:

## Number, please.

A thoughtful man said recently that he didn't think it was a good thing for people to be as constantly connected to the outside world as many are today with all kinds of devices (virtually none of which are used or understood by this reporter) which stem from the telephone. My thoughtful friend feels a need for our world to engage in more quiet reflection or just more quiet.

Could Alexander Graham Bell have imagined even with his clever inventor's brain that someday we would be able to make calls from a car (or a bike!) on the highway or to use that same telephone—carried in one's pocket—to access all kinds of information, photos, etc. and to "type" messages that could be sent immediately or, that at the beginning of a performance we'd be reminded to turn off our phones?

The Bell invention coincided with our centennial celebration in 1876. We can attest to the fact that twenty years later there were telephones in Suffolk and more than one company offered service in the town. In May of 1894 an ordinance was adopted by the Suffolk town council to grant Southern Bell Telephone & Telegraph Co. the right of way for erection and mainte-

nance of poles and wires.

Many companies were trying to enter the market. August of 1894 E.E. Holland, representing American Telephone and Telegraph Company, asked the Town council for a franchise. J.N. Burgess, of Nansemond Telephone Company, objected and asked for a delay to prepare his case.

In October 1898 Town Treasurer John Lotzia asked for a telephone in his office. At the council meeting in November the chairman reported that a Nansemond telephone had been installed in the Treasurer's office at a rental fee of \$20 per year.

In July of 1903 a Nansemond Telephone was installed in the Fire House at a cost of \$1.50 per month.

Chesapeake and Potomac Telephone Co. is mentioned early as well. It would soon be the line in Suffolk.

Let us say for the sake of posterity, early telephones were attached to the wall. Many houses had only one telephone in the early days—if they had any phone. Eventually a piece of furniture was designed to hold the phone and offer a place for the user of the phone to sit. This telephone table was usually in



a central location in the house, perhaps a hallway. The telephone was attached to a cord which was permanently attached to the wall.

The early phones had no dial. The user would pick up the phone and an operator seated at a switchboard in Suffolk (see p. 1) would say, "Number, please" and she would connect you by putting your line in the right connection on her board.

Numbers in downtown Suffolk were varied. In the 1949 Suffolk directory the Chamber of Commerce number was 1, Bentall Machine Co. plant in East Suffolk had 2 for its telephone number, Reginald Brothers Co. had the phone number 32. The Teacherage on Main Street had the number 744 and WLPM had 1420. Suffolk Creamery on Wilroy Rd. had 269-J-5.

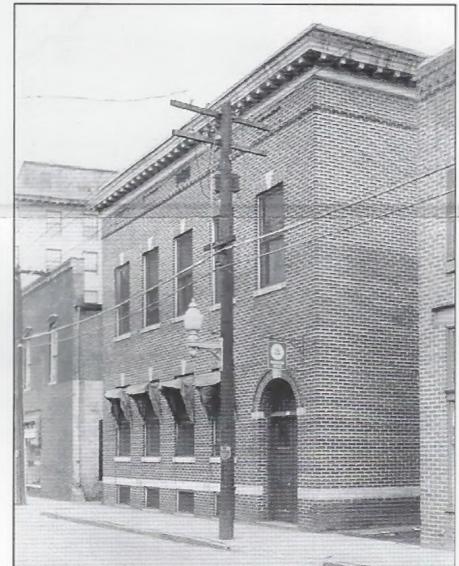
Soon after the aforementioned 1949 book came out, callers could dial the number they wished to reach in town but all long distance calls still needed operator assistance—dial 0 for operator.

## First Phone Company Building

It is likely that the early switchboard shown on p.1 was in rented space, perhaps above a store. By 1914 the new fireproof Chesapeake and Potomac office building shown right had been built on South Main St. This housed the switchboard and business office. Telephone repair crews received their orders here and telephone bills could be paid here as well, in cash if you preferred.

The office staff is pictured below on S. Main St. c. 1939; George Truitt, Byron White, Virgie Traylor, ?, Daisy Lupton, S.D. Carnes.

In 1949 a new modern telephone building was constructed on N. Main Street between the Christian Church and Main Street Methodist Church. Many of the same people who worked at the old building moved to the new one.



South Main Street building (demolished)



Right: C&P staff in front of the switchboard, 1947. Standing, l-r: George (Heavy) Truitt, Verna Mathews, Steve Carnes, Ethel Blanchard, Willie Johnson. Seated: Daisy Lupton, Nellie Hines, Alyma Morrisette, Ruth Jenkins, Doris Harrell.

## Dialing the Number — The New Building

On October 19, 1949, a new telephone building opened in the 200 block of North Main Street and the dial system was "cut" into service in Suffolk.

Annie Rountree took down the last manual call from the old office. Two of the men who had helped install the manual equipment in the old office in 1914 helped pull the heat coils to put the new dial system in service.

This was a momentous occasion. Mayor W.F. Whitley made a ceremonial first dialed call to City Manager W.R. Woodbury. Melvin Lovelace, Suffolk's Commonwealth's Attorney, made one of the first long distance calls with the new equipment, though that still required an operator's assistance. Two weeks later thousands of visitors attended a three-day open house.

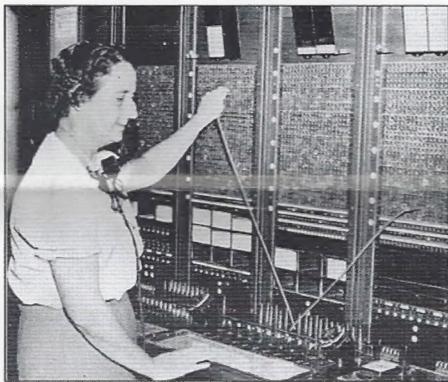
The big event was covered by local radio station WLPM (for World's Largest Peanut Market, in case you're not from here). A blow-by-blow account of the events of the day was given.

Alyma Morrisette, chief operator, S.D. Carnes, plant wire chief, and R.E. Heltzel were interviewed on the air.

Like the earlier building, this one was originally fully staffed. One could walk in and talk to live telephone company employees who offered full service. The office building now houses only computers.



200 block N. Main Street. Recent photo by John Johnson



Annie Rountree takes down the last manual call in 1949.



J.W. Vines and T.H. Harvey prepare to pull the heat coils to start the new service.

The 3,347 visitors might have thought they were going to a Hollywood premiere when they saw the new building illuminated with floodlights, and a spotlight focused on the Bell System flag.

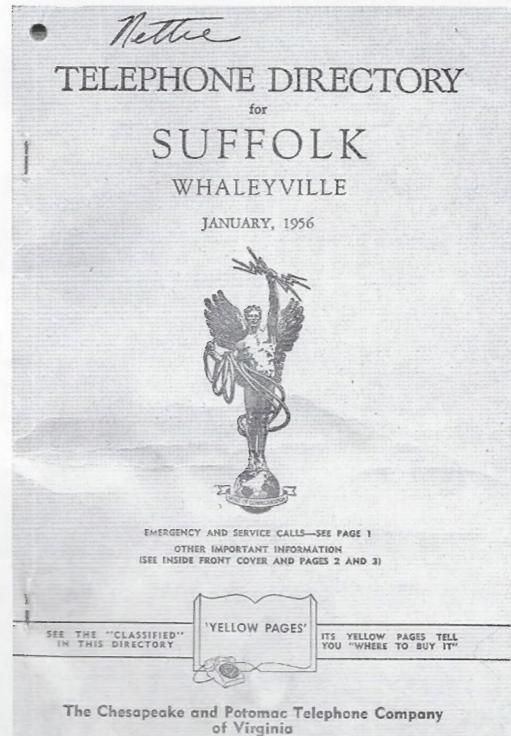
*This quote and vintage photos on this page from an unnamed publication.*



Melvin Lovelace makes one of the first long-distance calls, while E.D. Peterson, district commercial manager, Norfolk, Jack Cockey and Hunter Haynes, presidents of Rotary and Kiwanis respectively, stand by.



*Below: At the open house Frances Brothers demonstrates the voice mirror for a group of teenagers curious to hear their own telephone voices.*



The Telephone Directory, that useful book that has provided phone numbers, street addresses, advertising space and, in recent years, zip codes, is becoming a thing of the past.

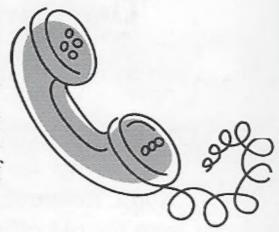


From The Virginian-Pilot, December 21, 1952:  
Mrs. Emmett H. Harrell receives her newly installed telephone from installer Herman Bradshaw as R.H.L. Chichester, C&P Manager, looks on. Mrs. Harrell is one of 27 inhabitants of the Lummis and Box Elder area to get telephone service as a result of construction recently completed by the telephone company.

## **Victims of Changing Times —**

### **Long Distance**

Again, for the sake of posterity, we record this. In most households long distance calls were an extra cost, considered an extravagance and reserved for reporting major news. If at all possible most of those calls were made after 8:00 p.m. or on Sundays when the rates were lower. The longer the distance the more expensive the call. Long distance calls were placed by the operator.



Tommy Arthur reports that it was not long distance to call Suffolk from Somerton or Whaleyville in the 1950s and 1960s but it was long distance to Holland. Holland was on Continental Telephone.

Person-to-person calls were placed by the operator, too. They were more expensive than station-to-station but if the caller wanted to speak to Jane Doe and no one else (i.e. her sorority sister) it was helpful.

### **Party Lines**

Not surprisingly, larger towns had telephones first. Gates County Historical Society president Edith Freeman Seiling reports that they had no phone in Gates County until 1935. She lived (and still lives) at Gates Station, once a stop on the Atlantic Coastline Railroad.

They were on a 10-party line. They didn't hear all of the phones ring but at anytime one might pick up the phone and discover that the line was in use by a neighbor. Though it wasn't the polite thing to do, some people on party lines entertained themselves by listening to others' calls on the line.

Linwood Moore went to work for C&P Telephone in 1953 and worked for 32 years. He said a telephone line ran alongside the Atlantic Coastline track providing service—albeit on 10-party lines—to Whaleyville and down to the state line. In the 1960s phone crews worked on Saturdays to install telephones outside downtown Whaleyville.

### **The Phone Booth**

They're almost gone from us now but until just a few years ago if one was away from home or the office or if one had no telephone, there were telephone booths around town or at stops along the highway. A member recalls that whenever she left on a date [in the 1960s] her father would always ask, "Do you have a dime?" That way she could call for help if anything went awry during her evening out. Phone booths were usually nearby.



A slight extravagance? Once rotary telephones were invented, telephone dialers were created to save fingernails. They were made of various materials. A sterling silver telephone dialer, like that shown here, was made famous in the movie *Breakfast at Tiffany's*.

## Postscripts to our June 2012 issue, A Tale of War

### YOUNG LADIES,

I want you to call at my store and look at my stock of

BEAUTIFUL DRESS GOODS, NOTIONS,  
CLOAKS, &c.

And don't forget to bring your mother or father with you when they come to town shopping. I will give you bargains.

Respectfully,  
BURWELL RIDDICK.

Ads in the Suffolk Female Institute Newspaper *The Casket*: left, an 1884 ad shows that Burwell Riddick was in the mercantile business before becoming a builder; right, is an 1882 ad for R.L. Brewer, a pall-bearer for Ada Browne Shepherd.

YOUNG GENTLEMEN CONTEMPLATING matrimony, and Young Ladies just beginning to think of keeping house, should call on

R. L. BREWER,

W-A-T-C-H-M-A-K-E-R A-N-D J-E-W-E-L-E-R,  
Washington square, Suffolk, Va.

And get the necessary articles, such as Wedding Rings, Standard Silverware, and everything in his line.

The public generally will find him ready to serve them with excellent goods.

### Speaker Series

Brittany Bennett (far right) of Wilmington, NC, and SNHS member Kermit Hobbs (right) addressed a capacity crowd in August at the Phillips-Dawson House about *Peanut Machinery Made in Suffolk, A Revolution in Peanut Farming*. Brittany spoke from her master's thesis at UNC-Wilmington which was titled *The Metal Hands of Labor: The Mechanization of the South and the Benthall Peanut Picker*. Kermit spoke from experience about his family business now known as Amadas.



Student historical society President Kaitlin Jefferson learns to maneuver the big punch ladle for Joe and Nancy Verdirame. Hazel White is at left. The punch bowl and ladle were given to SNHS by the Suffolk Woman's Club several years ago when the Woman's Club gave up their house on Bank Street.

A much requested recipe from this event:

### Kate's Chocolate Peanut Butter Bars

2 sticks butter, softened  
2 1/3 cups powdered sugar  
1 3/4 cups crushed graham crackers  
1 cup chunky peanut butter  
12 oz. semi-sweet chocolate

Combine first 4 ingredients, mix well and spread into an ungreased 8x11 pan. Melt chocolate and pour on top of mixture. Chill until set and enjoy!



Conrad Haas sells peanut items from the Train Station.



Kaitlin Jefferson (left) admires the flapper costume worn by fellow student member Emily Bazemore (right).

Students with Sue in Norfolk at the National Alliance of Preservation Commissions in July



## Thanks to our new and returning 2012 members.

Our memberships run with the calendar year.

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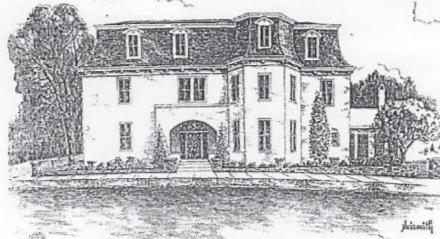
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### Gifts and Memorials through June 11, 2012

To the Phillips-Dawson House:  
*Suffolk Rotary Club*

- In honor of Lynn Barlow  
*Nita Bagnell*

To SNHS:

- In memory of Joan Frazier  
*Anonymous*

**Note:** The Phillips-Dawson House may be used on a limited basis by SNHS members for daytime club meetings or bridge parties for a donation. Call with questions 539-2781.

## Train Station Happenings

Birthday parties have become very popular at the Station. We have created two new options for parties. Pictured right is our most recent birthday boy, Jack Burgess, who celebrated his 3<sup>rd</sup> birthday at the Train Station. Call Susie for more information.

On the same day as the birthday party a bridal party showed up to take pictures on the porch.



### Train Station Calendar —

**September 29:** 11:00 am-3:00 pm,  
Touch A Truck, Train & More

**October 20 & 21:** Book Signing at  
the Station featuring *Yesterday's Trains  
Across the Commonwealth* by Dale W.  
Diacont, 1:00 – 4:00 Saturday and 2:00  
– 4:00 Sunday



**November 17<sup>th</sup>:** 6:00 - 9:00 pm  
Grand Illumination

**NOTE: The Train Station has 2 new emails:  
[suffolktrainstation.org](http://suffolktrainstation.org) or [susie@trainstation.org](mailto:susie@trainstation.org)**



The King-Ferguson house, 300 block of N. Main St. (demolished)

This house stood on Main St. in the lot across from Suffolk Female Institute. It was first the home of John King, one of the founders of Suffolk Peanut Co. and later founder of the John King Peanut Co. (see our Myrtle issue).

According to an oral history, this was later the home of W.B. Ferguson (1860-1935) who had an early telephone franchise in Suffolk. The lot is now part of the grounds of the Obici Healthcare Foundation.

SUFFOLK NANSEMOND  HISTORICAL SOCIETY  
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PAID  
SUFFOLK, VA  
PERMIT NO. 24

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c. 1914

There is so much more to say. Share your telephone stories with us.